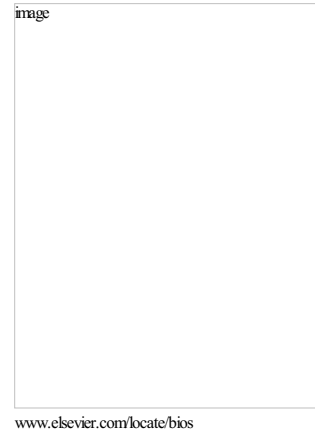


PURPOSE: A SLOW DAWNING FOR US ALL?

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## Purpose: A Slow Dawning For Us All?

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## Purpose: A Slow Dawning For Us All?

*"I often think it comical (fah-la-la-lah...) how Nature always doth contrive (fah-la-la-lah)*

*That every boy and every gal that's born into this world alive  
Is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative (fah-la-la-lah)...*

**Sgt Willis, Iolanthe, Gilbert and Sullivan**

You will have noticed how some people usually expect good outcomes and others for whom the 'glass is half empty'; quite draining companions. In science seminars, some are usually interested in new ideas and constructively critical while others remain unimpressed. Some scientific colleagues and students assume *a priori* that Nature is randomly pointless and others that it is purposeful. A Professorial science friend and colleague, then unknowingly near the end of his life, once remarked to me "What's the point of it all?"

My worldview was early fixed with the astounding picture of the Periodic Table, the exquisite order making chemistry so much easier to grasp. Order to me spelt Purpose but it has taken decades more to figure out why it is actually more general. I once watched a squadron of lightning-fast swallows hunting swarms of minute flying things over the lakeside. Their bodies were so clearly fit for purpose, as were their feast-victims so fortuitously prolific. Such Darwinian adaptation exists all around.

So Purpose does exist. But Purpose demands some job not yet complete. Swallows do their bit for the food chain while humans are parasitic and could destroy it. Is there a deeper point to it all, for humans? Does it matter anyway?

As human populations reach critical mass and we see their problems made worse worldwide by climate change, personal and corporate greed, gross inequality and a litany of other divisive issues, it is impossible to deny that this century will be critical for all life forms on Earth. If humanity could see even a hope of a Higher Purpose and be incentivised to follow it, then yes it matters. No small task.

To be sure there is a large body of opinion in science that could be familiarly paraphrased as the Dawkins/Hawking Axis of Nihil. This opinion offers, literally, nothing, especially for Purpose. Are there cogent scientific reasons to dispute Nihilism?

Statutory Warning: the following may be offensive to some readers and harmful to the careers of younger persons by impacting their granting bodies.

Early this 21<sup>st</sup> century we already see much new data and perspectives suggestive of a burgeoning new worldview, not so much in the peer-reviewed mainstream (hypersensitive to ‘reputation’) but more in independent books. These things take a century or two; at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Universe seemed a simple clockwork mechanism needing only to measure the rules better. This worldview of Materialist Science remains the norm amongst non-physicist scientists. But (some) physicists are currently in a quandary, exemplified by the 100-year-old Quantum Measurement Problem: does Consciousness really influence the wave behaviour of sub-atomic particles? This question was sketched out elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

This essay is mainly addressed to fellow scientists who are more likely to stay with a Materialist paradigm than the general public<sup>2</sup>, yet although they may not realise it have a leadership responsibility to this public on scientific issues that matter. The basic make-up of the Universe matters to everyone in it. Although there are many more that show Sgt Willis’ Divide as clearly, I propose to look for reasons for it in the science of the following three numbered headings.

One more point: as scientists we know that no explanation is currently final, and no matter how well documented it is always subject to new data: the evidence is always key. Often we must settle for what seems most likely as our working understanding providing nothing convincingly contradicts it. The essences of the following are for me overwhelmingly the most likely explanations, which is why I present them at at this time.

## 1. DEBUNKERS DEBUNKED

We are indebted to Robert McLuhan<sup>3</sup> for a detailed, even exhaustive, analysis of the committed debunkers of non-materialist ideas. He is well qualified, having the accolade of a page on Rational Wiki where he is described as a British promoter of pseudoscience unencumbered by formal science training, but (horrors!) a council member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR).

‘Randi’s Prize’ was a million dollar offer by the professional trickster and stage magician James Randi to anyone who could convince him of the existence of the paranormal (Psi), and the fact that no one had claimed it was held as proof that Psi does not exist! Self-importance on a pedestal. McLuhan describes his journey as one seriously trying to understand the truth of Psi reports because of their spiritual implications, which he considers do matter. He starts by examining opinions of sceptics on ‘irrational beliefs’, and slowly comes to realise the superficial and invective-laden, even vicious and spiteful, nature of their statements. It is doubtful if any sceptics can have ever read the original formal reports, while McLuhan found a treasure-trove at the library of the SPR in West London and spent many hours doing just that. He also came to realise that Psi was a very young science that had much to learn, especially making its experimental results proof against fraud of which it was constantly accused, far beyond most sciences. Another realisation was that people vary enormously, even from day to day, similarly affecting replicability (as biologists know well). But he also found that the researchers were always driven by curiosity, and had no material, religious or PR opportunity for gain; they could be more critical than the sceptics and claims were ‘picked apart in forensic detail, with a detached and often sceptical spirit’.

McLuhan further explores specific areas of Psi; firstly as useful detailed examples Poltergeist phenomena and the volatile but gifted Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. Clear instances of deception and fraud were found but were exceeded by genuinely unexplainable events. A more general survey of most areas of Psi follows. More revealing for our present enquiry are the behaviours of the sceptics, especially Randi's, whose zeal is commendable but one must ask: why? Curiosity was hardly a motive, since he was only interested in possible areas of attack not the truth, as it was 'obviously' all a lie.

Some reasons given for scepticism are also germane. Some are obvious and valid mental effects must be confined to the brain, no tangible entity proposed only that 'something odd is going on', and most research is directed to proving just that unlikely fact. Just so; this is an entirely new Science and an exciting one. The observations have been endlessly replicated, but mentation is dependent on mental state (see if chess masters can replicate their computer chess scores in a modern disco); clearly a new Theory of Everything is needed; any argument 'surely' presupposes its weakness.

Some reasons are spurious: accusations of 'New Ageism' and Creationism, of deliberate cheating and its improbability on the scale needed. But some points were well taken: security against fraud or clue/hint transmission, proper randomisation, the 'file drawer effect' where only desirable results might be selected to be published. When these objections were met, the interesting results persisted. The sceptics then changed tack: the aim became to create Doubt by derision and emotive/abusive language. By this time mainstream Science had lost interest. McLuhan's book is an easy and fascinating read, although at 800 pages a shorter version may be timely.

Here we may consider the contrast between the Silver Chain and the Faggot ('faggot', a bundle of sticks; alternatively, the fasces symbol of collective strength of the ancient Roman republic, both terms uncomfortable). Most philosophical arguments comprise silver chains of syllogisms or other reasoning where the whole chain is no stronger than its weakest link. More scientifically, these are arguments in parallel (faggots) or in series (chains), where respectively a failure in one is irrelevant or catastrophic to the whole. It is surprising how many valid observations are consistently dismissed as merely 'anecdotal': how many anecdotes make a faggot? And how airflights must you take before conceding that heavier-than-air flight is not impossible?

The late Victor Stenger, PhD, a prolific and influential writer of Nihilist books, was also an astrophysicist, emeritus professor of physics and astronomy (U. Hawaii) and adjunct professor of philosophy (U. Colorado); meaningfully also, a fellow of CSICOP, the top body of American sceptics. His book<sup>4</sup> really takes us into broader territory and I will return to it in the end section. However, he presented as a more sophisticated sceptic and so should be his scientific arguments.

But I find he actually makes a series of quite ridiculous claims. Firstly he dismisses all the data of ESP on the grounds that they do not meet the same criteria accepted by other sciences with an 'unbroken history of negative results'. That is simply untrue and means he has not actually read any original report let alone all of them. He ignores the criteria normal in biology. He also states that 'extraordinary' claims need extraordinary evidence but such claims only seem extraordinary to those with no personal or family experience of them. He regards metanalysis as 'highly questionable' but does not explain why.

Then follows the most risible red herring of all. He states that when the P value is  $<0.05$  then one in twenty of the reports are wrong, and that all medical reports have this flaw! But what does 'wrong' mean? Using an imaginary test (say real herrings to measure their lengths in a day's catch), it is not hard to assemble a series of 20 numbers to give a reasonable bell-shaped curve, a P value of 0.045 and a mean of 100.02 mm, the greatest deviation being 0.8 mm in two fish, above *and* below 100.00, which actually came up in only three fish. (This is a contrived experiment but quite an unsurprising outcome). So which is the 'wrong' result? Clearly this is a fallacious concept, which surely the author himself must have realised. His arguments against Psi look more like expostulations, which vanish against the relative strength of the experimental evidence, where the faggot/fasces comprises so many independent observations that its overall strength is not compromised by weakness in one of them.

Finally, Stenger asks why Psi has not caught on with mainstream science and concludes therefore that Psi 'very likely does not exist'. He does not ask why so many bona fide scientists have persisted for 150 years with a science that seemingly does not exist.

## 2. THE TURIN SHROUD

How would you feel, dear reader, if you realised the Shroud of Turin might be authentic after all? Oh no, not that sorry old chestnut you may say! And who would blame you - surely the cold water of the 1989 carbon dating<sup>5</sup> put out that old ember? But recently I read the original data for myself and noticed a curious anomaly.

Four contiguous samples were carefully cut from one edge of the Shroud, and a portion of each was sent to three reliable labs for testing (Zurich, U. Arizona Tucson and Oxford U.), together with three linen controls of age known from historical dating. The samples were cleaned using ultrasonic baths and several different textile methods (which did not affect results), converted via CO<sub>2</sub> to graphite, then  $^{14}\text{C}/^{13}\text{C}$  ratios measured by accelerator-mass-spectroscopy (AMS) and  $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$  by conventional MS (Tucson and Oxford). Zurich determined both  $^{14}\text{C}/^{13}\text{C}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$  quasi-simultaneously by AMS. The operation was certificated, samples disbursed and results analysed statistically by the British Museum. The data were calibrated using known isotope ratios obtained by dendrochronological dating, and 3-5 replicate MS or AMS runs were done on each sample. The control sample data are stated to agree well with previous radiocarbon and/or historical data but are not presented.

This is clearly rigorous science, and the results are summarised in Table 1.

The use of the term 'Radiocarbon dating', plus the collective prestige of the sponsoring Institutions, the 21 authors and the publishing vehicle, seems overwhelmingly impressive. But is it really?

These carefully obtained results, on most precious materials, appear subsequently treated in an egregiously unscientific manner. While the three labs agree closely on each sample, the unanimous outlier of sample 3 (which also agrees well with conventional radiocarbon dating additionally done by the British Museum) is omitted and the three other means are lumped together to yield a 'rounded calendar age of AD 1260-1390 with at least 95% confidence limits'. This is held to be 'conclusive evidence that the linen of the Turin Shroud is mediaeval'! Such an incredible conclusion ignores the fact that replicates from each lab vary much less than the means among most samples, and so the latter variation cannot be due to measurement error. There was no discussion of the conclusion in the paper, just this

blunt statement. Ironically, sample 3 gives exactly the value expected if the Shroud were authentic.

I could not have got away with this blatant fudging of an obvious sampling error in high school science, let alone a published paper. As a Reviewer and Editor, I would have felt obliged to demand resampling or outright rejection. I have not seen this aspect discussed elsewhere; was this a deliberate cover-up? If so it seems they got away with it. Regarded as a simple undergraduate assay of four or twelve replicates, the means are respectively 888.5 AD and 882.8 AD with standard deviations 67% and 59.5% of the means, a very unimpressive assay. Reading the final results carefully, it is clear that sample 3 has been dismissed as an irrelevant outlier and only samples 1, 2, and 4 used but I cannot find this explicitly stated. After this apparently surreptitious ploy, the results were further 'rounded up' for technical reasons that are not quite clear. Contamination surviving the washings can only increase the apparent age towards modern values and so any suspicion should fall on the 'younger' ages given. What if all these three were the actual outliers? It seems the results were selected to support the 'rational' expectation.

The predictable result is that this extraordinary relic is written out of mainstream science. But careful study has continued prolifically, necessarily in lower profile publications<sup>6</sup>. Dating by other less-accurate methods (opto-chemical and several mechanical<sup>7</sup>) show that Shroud fibres are certainly pre-mediaeval (90AD  $\pm$  200 years, 95% confidence level). Scholars will always seek corroboration elsewhere whether doubt exists or not and may prefer to rely on historical/archaeological dating, for example peat bog stratification or the Egyptian Pharaoh succession known from much field work. For the Shroud the historical provenance is incomplete although credible, while archaeological evidence is very persuasive if not conclusive. The forensic pollen trail leads back to Constantinople, Urfa in south eastern Turkey near Syria (ancient Edessa, an important Christian centre of pilgrimage before the Saracen conquest) and Palestine in the Spring, while traces of soil found on the feet, knee regions, chest and face indicate an undefended, heavy fall in an area of aragonite-travertine sand found around Jerusalem but rarely elsewhere. Edessa is associated with the Mandylion; a traditional cloth image of the face of Jesus said to be copied in some Byzantine coinage and many icons. The 3-D negative images (of unknown causation) on the Shroud strikingly resemble these copies, and are the most compelling evidence. They correspond exactly to the multiple traumas recorded as inflicted upon the historical Jesus<sup>8,9</sup>. Images on the eyelids could (debatably) be related to rare coin types issued during Pilate's governorship. The controversy has continued unresolved online but with vigour. At best, the 1988 data are misleading, even suspiciously so.

The buck naturally stopped with the then Editor, the late Sir John Maddox, an occasional associate of James Randi. Why did he block this obvious debate?

Anyway, does this whole issue matter? Well, yes - profoundly. The Shroud images, if authentic, would amount to a photographic record of the physical atrocities accepted by the voluntary Messenger to emphasise his vital message of the way the Universe is comprised, not to mention a 3-D portrait of the Messenger himself. The unknown mechanism of image formation, certainly not man-made, could conceivably relate to a mechanism of a Resurrection. The PR implications of this are enormous, more for the neutral observer than the committed Christian; its suppression quashes an important opportunity to reconcile some differences between Religion and Science. The key issue here is the nature of the Universe: is it crucially non-material as the Messenger insisted? We should watch that space.

### 3. REINCARNATION

If there exists a discarnate transferable package of all the skills, desires, foibles, memories and personality of a human individual that survives its death, then a reasonable place to look for one would be the presumably blank slate of a young child just learning to talk/express itself. In fact, posting one apparently successful find on Facebook elicited ‘thousands’ of confirming responses; dozens of them are detailed<sup>10</sup>. These are not collectively convincing but far more than just persuasive, precisely the data to tempt a curiosity-driven study; this is actually how science progresses.

The late Ian Stevenson, MD, professor of psychiatry at U. Virginia had with colleagues already famously applied such an approach; his scholarly works make slow reading for the layman but shorter versions are now available.<sup>11, 12</sup> They offer a formidable portfolio of over 2500 carefully researched cases in which many have been independently verified and apparent previous lives identified (‘solved’ cases). Such memories may be linked with violent or otherwise especially memorable deaths, sometimes associated with birthmarks corresponding to death injuries. Reading case after case, corroborating detail after detail, leaves a feeling of no alternative to the reality of reincarnation in these cases.

Is this scientific proof of principle? Well, no; the concept is probably non-provable and non-falsifiable yet as available for careful scientific method as psychology and psychiatry, history and detective work<sup>13</sup>. Such data are certainly very persuasive – we have free choice as to whether we think the idea impossible or not. The question is also open as to whether all lifetimes are necessarily repeats.

Sceptics naturally have copious views here and it is again useful to understand them. McLuhan<sup>3</sup> reports many, which he considers in careful detail but leaves none with any substance, although he also reports many weaknesses in the data. Personally I find his analysis compelling. Stenger however is almost silent on the topic; he equates Nirvana with nothingness. Such is the faith of Nihilism.

It is not surprising that most cases of reincarnation are from Eastern countries where such belief is common but a substantial number of Western presumptive cases has also come to light<sup>12, 14</sup>, some of them ‘solved’. Two of the most persuasive are recent American<sup>15, 16</sup>, where in each case, while both parents were initially sceptical, one parent had severe emotional stress because of religious prohibitions. This would naturally reduce incidence of reported cases, reinforced by ridicule from others sometimes with almost medieval superstitious fear. Significantly, surviving shipmates/teammates of the previous personalities seemed happy with their reincarnation as these little boys.

Why is there so much non-acceptance in the West? Belief in reincarnation is banned in Christianity and Islam: but why? To quote American publisher and Theosophist James M. Pryse<sup>17</sup> “...while belief in reincarnation was almost universal in the time of Jesus, and was an essential doctrine in all the so-called pagan religions, it is nowhere denied, disputed or questioned in the New Testament”. Indeed, several passages there and in the Old Testament are most reasonably interpreted to actually affirm it: it was not so much taught as just taken for granted then. So what changed?

In his fascinating book on hypnotic past-life regressions with one unusual subject, Weiss<sup>18</sup> states that Constantine the Great and his mother the Empress Helena edited out all reference to reincarnation, although this is contradicted by the few instances remaining. But this idea is vigorously disputed online as lacking any reputable source. The most likely explanation<sup>19</sup> is that by the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD the Christian church had developed several teachings by earlier Church Fathers that were

attracting away members and weakening the central church. At the 5<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Congress of Constantinople (AD 553) such teachings were accordingly declared heresies; unfortunately for future proper spiritual understanding, some also included teaching of reincarnation. So belief in reincarnation was banned accidentally for political not for spiritual issues!

There were other political problems. Ordinary people were being told that they were gods, with the promise of a life everlasting if they could just believe what the Messenger Jesus said; the bishops realised that, given their lack of sophistication, something stronger than just belief was needed. The ideas of a Soul, a Higher Deity and Jesus himself were reconciled by the concept of the Holy Trinity in which Jesus was deified, a concept familiar to Romans. The ancient pagan concepts of Purgatory, Limbo and Hellfire were retained presumably for extra discipline and still remain, although not mentioned in the New Testament. These continue as problems for modern pilgrims trying to reconcile old Religion with Unconditional Love.

The corollary of Stevenson's working hypothesis (first paragraph, this section) is that, if the evidence for reincarnation is persuasive for you, then so it must be for the existence of that package of personality hypothetically surviving physical death. This is a most crucial acceptance. A number of sincere Christians accept the likelihood of reincarnation. Perhaps, since the political pressure is gone, it is time for western and Islamic churches to embrace this new spiritual opportunity.

## THE "WHY" QUESTION

We know our children are beginning to reason when the relentless "Why" questions start: this question presupposes some purpose to everything (and also that parents have the answers). We know dogs are intelligent and can solve some problems by reason, especially if their genes are closer to wild type. We also find that dogs often query their pack leaders/owners; usually the question is the "I want" one, and sometimes "How". But without incentives actually in view (fun, food, fear) the "Why" question was not even on the menu for our five live-in companions over the years. So can it be that the cosmic importance of the ultimate "Why" question is just not relevant to Nihilists?

It seems that Sgt Willis' Divide is alive and well outside politics. One illuminating outcome of the Psi guessing games was that some participants consistently scored high while others scored low ('separating sheep and goats'), and seemed to correlate with confidence in their ability; i.e. whether they believed in it or not. 'Belief' or 'Faith' can be a nebulous concept; at its core is really 'Trust'. What or whom do you trust?

Stenger<sup>4</sup> uses many philosophical arguments in his denial of a non-material Mind. Personally I found none remotely even gave me pause but I have no qualification in Philosophy, only the Natural sort (PhD); nevertheless his entire case collapses on the basic premise of Logic that a negative proposition can never be proved. One can only say that Stenger looked (and looked) for proof to convince *him* of a Creative Mind and found none. Although he acknowledges the possibility of a Hidden Deity he 'wants nothing to do with it' (p. 240) but still does not bother to ask why such an entity might prefer to remain so.

Among the sceptics we see scholars and scoffers, seekers and sneerers, doers and deniers. Their motivation also merits the "Why" question, asked in each of the numbered sections above. For Randi and Stenger, balanced objectivity and the truth are clearly not in view, rather they are like Counsel for the Prosecution trying to dazzle with part of the science and denying the rest to distract the jury; their object is



only to win, or appear to. Sometimes the invective becomes a little shrill and sounds like fear; interesting for the psychologist. Stenger has devoted at least six books to his thesis. Why? The Lady doth protest too much, methinks.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ours is a very young self-aware species. If the history of the Earth were spread over a full calendar year, the first life (bacteria) appears in early February, the first dinosaurs by December 10 and leave on Christmas Day, the first Homo species by 11.45 pm on December 31, and the recorded history of humanity fills just the last minute<sup>20</sup>. Our species' immaturity is self-evident; like a 2-5 year old in a tantrum, we *won't* share our toys or cake, lash out at everybody in our way, and even wreck the living room and everyone in it to get more cake. But we are getting bigger and more powerful; the living room soon won't cope unless we grow up a bit.

Also like your youngster, you can't *make* her walk, but she will anyway (then your life will never be the same again). But watch his face when he finally lets go of that table-leg and steps out *alone*: surprise and triumph! She really wanted to do that; he knew he was human and wanted to get about upright like other humans. She trusted her ability, and finally took that leap of faith. I remember that learning to swim was much the same.

I had long thought that word in the Anglican burial service was something of an oxymoron: how could there be a 'sure and certain *hope* of anything? I now realize that the Messengers could only tell us that a life everlasting existed, and even if we trusted them we can't *know* until we go there, because we have been programmed largely to forget where we have already been. But, in a hopeless epoch, it was this hope that was the exciting new message.

If an omnipotent One Mind could create an entire Universe, It could also emblazon all the heavens with an unambiguous symbol, then all humanity would fall to the ground in fear and be converted. Obvious and incontrovertible proof would amount to the same thing. But this is not how an unconditionally loving parent would have it, consistent with absolute Free Will. Walsch<sup>21</sup> suggests a feasible understanding of how Unconditional Love can work in relation to the Argument from Evil.

Coercion of any kind is quite counterproductive. 'House Rules' are different: children soon learn what works and what does not, like hot stoves; what is called 'karma' can be likened to House Rules spread over many lifetimes. Any action automatically gets its due reaction no 'judgement' is involved. We all yearn for our children to love us spontaneously, which they will if we show we love them back and can be trusted. All they, and humanity in relation to the One Mind, need to do is to take that small leap of trust and hope. And so we cannot expect ever to find firm scientific proof of Purpose; all we are given are hints such as the tips of the iceberg outlined above, available to us if we look with open mind. Such approaches are anathema to the pure Materialist; perhaps 'hope' is the difference between Sheep and Goats and the reason for Sgt Willis' Divide. Many people today live without ultimate hope and don't know it; much of this buck stops with scientists bamboozled by debunkers.

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Table 1. Radiocarbon dating of the Turin Shroud<sup>5</sup>  
The values are expressed in years, AD or CE, the ranges are 68% confidence limits.

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
Tucson	1304±31	1023±32	45±46	1229±43
Oxford	1200±30	1010±30	30±35	1195±30
Zurich	1274±24	1009±23	10±30	1265±34
Weighted Means	1261±16	1013±16	14±20	1266±20